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Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace

Are you a good businessperson? Can you manage the stressful situations that often take part in international trade? How would you deal with Japanese customers? How would you behave when invited to dinner by a Chinese customer? Is there any kind of basic “international business behavior”? Would you be able to work for a German company? What about the American way of dealing with the working force? Any businessperson should have an answer for each one of these questions. Globalization, the expansion of intercontinental trade, technological advances and the increase in the number of companies dealing on the international stage have brought about a dramatic change in the frequency, context and means by which people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Today's companies are doing business more and more in a global context. The people that count in any business from the suppliers to clients to employees are increasingly based in remote locations in foreign countries. The need for effective and clear intercultural communication is becoming vital in securing success in today's global workplace.

Intercultural communication has many definitions. In short intercultural communication looks at how people, from differing cultural backgrounds, endeavour to communicate. It draws on areas such as cultural anthropology and other areas of communication to build an academic framework. At its foundation is the desire to establish and understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other and help people improve this.

Within the context of the global workplace, intercultural communication looks at how people communicate (verbally and non-verbally), manage, work together, approach deadlines, negotiate, meet, greet, build relationships and much more. Companies and individuals looking to do business within the global workplace often fail to address such areas before doing business abroad. This can and does lead to poor performance and lost deals. Greater understanding of intercultural differences,

etiquette, protocol and communication as well as more informed planning will certainly lead to a much higher probability of achieving business goals. Cross cultural solutions to international business demands are increasingly being viewed as a valid and necessary method in enhancing communication and interaction in and between companies, between companies and customers and between colleagues. Cross cultural consultancies are involved in aiding companies to find solutions to the challenges cross cultural differences carry. Daily practice often shows professionals that working abroad or in an international setting is harder than expected beforehand and that academic contents do not seem basic in some specific situations.

International and national businesses are ultimately the result of people. As with incompatible software, if people are running on different cultural coding, problems can occur. Cross cultural consultancies therefore concentrate their efforts on interpersonal communication.

Intercultural communication today means getting a competitive edge. Why? Because today business is highly competitive and fast changing. People need to get it right, and get it right the first time. Whether someone is looking for a new supplier, giving a presentation, or negotiating a contract intercultural communication can, does and will play an important role. It impacts our ability to communicate effectively within a culture as well as how we are perceived. Etiquette and protocol aside, people with intercultural communication skills are those with certain key competencies and characteristics. Those that do well working with other cultures usually demonstrate open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, patience and self-awareness. These basic skills help nurture a sympathetic, personal and intuitive approach to doing business that lends itself to working with the unknown. However, this is only a firm foundation. Individuals also need to acquire operational tools and practical skills to help them express themselves and adapt their style and approach to the needs of the target culture. This is achieved through research, experience, intercultural training courses and asking colleagues. Cross cultural solutions to international business demands are increasingly being viewed as a valid and necessary method in enhancing

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International and national businesses are ultimately the result of people. As with incompatible software, if people are running on different cultural coding, problems can occur. Cross cultural consultancies therefore concentrate their efforts on interpersonal communication. Different cultures and cultural backgrounds between a highly diverse staff base brings with it obstacles, challenges and difficulties. Cross cultural differences manifest in general areas such as in behaviour, etiquette, norms, values, expressions, group mechanics and non-verbal communication. These cross cultural differences then follow on through to high level areas such as management styles, corporate culture, marketing, HR and PR.

Working in the global workplace, although a necessity, is proving to have a positive effect on individuals and companies. As people are forced to think outside the box they develop greater interpersonal skills and learn new ways of doing things. In conclusion, the need for intercultural communication skill is obvious - we are all working in an interconnected global economy and it is important to build good relationships with people from other cultures. This leads to better business.

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